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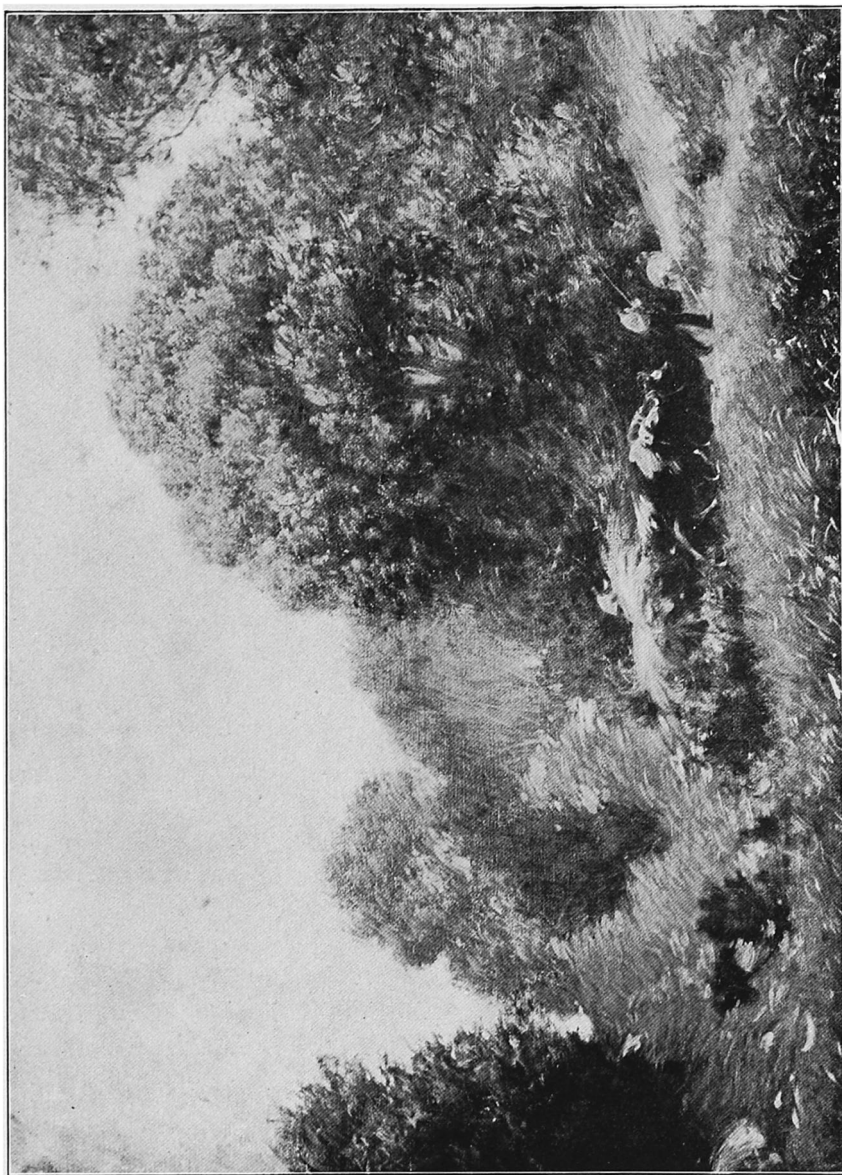
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THE SOUTH WIND  
By Frank Vincent Du Mond  
Shown at the Lewis and Clark Exposition



# BRUSH AND PENCIL

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## THE GLORY AND SHAME OF MEZZOTINTING

The result of a study of mezzotint-engraving as practised in the days supposed to be its greatest, under such auspices, for instance, as those furnished by Sidney Colvin's recent exhibition of mezzotints at the British Museum, in which the masters of the art from Von Siegen and Prince Rupert, about the middle of the seventeenth century, down to the engravers who reproduced Hoppner and Lawrence in the first part of the nineteenth century, were represented, is the conviction that never has an art suffered more from its admirers and patrons. Mezzotint has some very beautiful qualities, and is full of delightful possibilities for the artist who understands it. There is no method of engraving that yields such rich blacks, such depth and color, such variety in texture; none, one would think, that lent itself so well to the reproductions of paintings. But it has the defects of its qualities, and probably there is no method of engraving that can be so easily abused, that abounds in so many pitfalls of mere prettiness and meretriciousness. One of the extraordinary things about it is that, technically, its inventor (or rather the pupil of its inventor) left so little chance of improvement or development. There is not a mezzotint extant finer than that famous copy of Spagnoletto's "Executioner," by Prince Rupert. It reveals at once all that can be got out of a plate when the engraver works



BEATRICE D'ESTE  
By S. Arlent-Edwards  
Mezzotint after Leonardo Da Vinci

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on it in what the French appropriately call *la manière noire*. And it reveals more than this—or would have revealed more had Prince Rupert's followers had eyes to see—for it shows the value of restraint. The men who reproduced Reynolds and Romney only too often threw restraint to the winds, and sought, above all, the much-vaunted "velvety black" that de-

lighted their fashionable friends but becomes cloying in the end. The blacks in Prince Rupert's print have far more virility and vigor, far more variety of gradation, far more truth of tone.

It is no less curious that the mezzotinters who came immediately after Prince Rupert should have made the mistake of overdryness in their plates. In comparison with that splendid "Executioner," the prints of Blooteling and Vaillant, of Francis Place and George White—with occasional exceptions, more particularly by Blooteling and Place—have a ten-



GEORGIANA

By H. Scott Bridgwater

Mezzotint after John Downman

dency to hardness and colorlessness. These engravers seem either not to have known what they could do with mezzotint, or else, knowing, to have been afraid to do it. It is the more inexplicable because the later generation of mezzotinters, when the art had been popularized, went to the other extreme of softness and exaggerated color, even the very best of them.

To go through the numerous prints by McArdell, and Dickinson, and Valentine Green, and John Raphael Smith, and the Wards, and the Watsons, and the others, as I pointed out in a press review at the time of the exhibition referred to, is to be satiated by their sweetness, to weary of their conventional charm. What is apt to be forgotten, since the modern collector has made the old mezzotint the rival of the Japanese print and the post-

age stamp, is that all these men worked almost exclusively for fashionable patronage, and rarely, like the original engraver, primarily for their own amusement. People went to the mezzotint-engraver as they went afterwards to the photographer; what they wanted from him was what they get more to their fancy from the camera and the faker of photographs—I mean the “artist-photographer.” The mezzotinter could not serve his clients so satisfactorily, for the simple reason that his business was not to make portraits from life, but to reproduce them from paintings—usually from the work of the most distinguished and best known painters of the period.



PATIENCE  
By S. Arlent-Edwards  
Mezzotint after George Romney



LADY HAMILTON  
By S. Arlent-Edwards  
Mezzotint after George Romney

However, he did his utmost, and it must be confessed, if we are honest, that the distinguished painters often played into their hands. Reynolds and Romney and their school were not always above adapting their work to their sitters' taste; and, besides, the traditions of Van Dyck, by the time they reached the English portrait-painters of the eighteenth century by way of Lely and Kneller, tended to artificial elegance and a tiresome decorative formula; and, in the fashionable mezzotint, elegance and decoration were intensified a hundred-fold. Nothing was spared in the affectation or languishing of a pose: draperies swirled with a more aban-

doned grace, ribands flew out at more tender angles, and, in the background, foliage became more feathery, clouds more an affair of curves and pattern.

All these things were rendered and exaggerated with the greatest skill, for the mezzotinters of the day were masters of their craft. That they were

often artists, too, is proved in plates where the fashionable demands upon them were less stringent, where grace and decorative prettiness were at a discount. I do not think any one could have gone to the British Museum, have looked dispassionately at the collection there, and then have denied that the masterpieces of mezzotint are found, not among the portraits of women now fetching sensational prices in the salesrooms, but among the portraits of men now to be had for a comparative song. In these you feel that the engravers were doing the work they cared for in the way that pleased them most.

McArdell's "Lords John and Bernard Stuart," after Van Dyck; Edward Fisher's "Lawrence Sterne," after Reynolds; James Watson's "Samuel Johnson," Thomas



COUNTESS OF OXFORD AND CHILD

By H. Henderson

Mezzotint after John Hoppner

Watson's "David Garrick," John Raphael Smith's "Lord Richard Cavendish," Dickinson's "Duke of Rutland," all after Reynolds; and, to me one of the most successful, Valentine Green's beautiful interpretation of Reynolds's portrait of himself, so dignified and simple in treatment, so true in tone, such subtle gradation in the grays and blacks—these are the prints that arrested you as you passed the prints that are the great glory of the art.

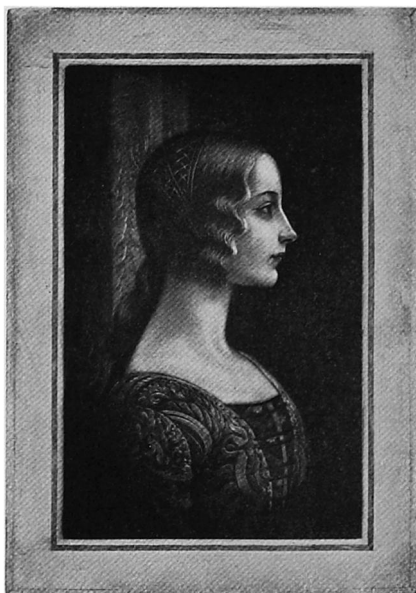


AN EARLY RISER—ORIGINAL MEZZOTINT  
By Seymour Haden



Altogether, the exhibition must have filled the real lover of mezzotint with regret that so fine a method should have been at the mercy of fashion, both in its prime, when fashion ordered the prints, and to-day, when fashion collects them. Prince Rupert, in his "Executioner," the famous Englishmen in their portraits of men, have demonstrated beyond a doubt what the method can do in the rendering of figures; what it can do in the suggestion of landscape may be seen in the all too few examples by Turner for his "Liber Studiorum," and in the simpler plates by Lucas after Constable. I cannot help wishing that Mr. Colvin, while omitting, as he rightly did, the inferior work of most of the men who carried on the tradition in the nineteenth century, had given a place to these mezzotints by Turner and Lucas, for I know of none that explain better how admirably adapted the medium is to landscape, how entirely it reserves its finest effects for subjects that can be expressed in large, simple masses and broad outlines, without tedious detail and niggling. Here, really, is its province, though one in which it has been least developed.

It is, as I said in the New York Evening Post, when you consider the great achievements of which the art is capable, the great things it has accomplished, in the translation into black-and-white of good portraits of men by distinguished painters; when you remember the chance it offers to the original artist who has fought so shy of it, that you resent the money inflicted on it by fashion—first, by tempting the engravers during their lifetime with a sure and easy means of making a livelihood, and then by giving predominance to their least important, their least vigorous work (that is, artistically) through a passing fad of the collector. When all is said, however, it is only fair to admit that the popular portraits of women in mezzotint, by the eighteenth-century school of engravers after the eighteenth-century portrait-painters, are perhaps better worth collecting than the often feeble color prints that are no less the fad of the moment.



LUDOVICA TORNABUONI  
By S. Arlent-Edwards  
Mezzotint after Ghirlandais



Taste, of course, is a matter of flux, what is popular to-day giving place to something else that is demanded to-morrow; and fashion determines the trend of artistic endeavor. At the present moment colored mezzo-



FOUR TEMPLE DOORS

Japanese Gold Lacquer Fret, Silk Lining  
(See following article)

tints—and many of them have a high degree of excellence—are the vogue. Collectors, doubtless, are not making a mistake in gathering together the choicest examples of this class of work. I should be loath, however, to see the old mezzotints I have been discussing side-tracked in deference to the current whim.

N. N.



PORTRAIT  
By Irving R. Wiles  
Shown at the Lewis and Clark Exposition

